

Buddha's Footprint discovered in a remote village of (Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan)

By Chin Hu

February 2, 2017. Being a Korean Buddhist, Gilgit-Baltistan has got a great attraction for me. Gilgit-Baltistan has been center of Buddhism. The Buddhists of Gilgit-Baltistan have left a great amount of rock arts all over Gilgit-Baltistan. In last February 2017, I was on my photographic mission to take some good pictures of historical Rock Art in Gilgit-Baltistan. Visiting number of villages, I reached an important village of Gilgit-Baltistan called ChatorKhand, Ishkoman. When I asked local people about any rock art in area, they showed me number of rock art. While I was visiting different sites, a villager came to me and told me about an unusual stone with a carved foot it. I rushed to the site with that man and he took me a home and showed me a rock on the roof of a house. I climbed on the roof and studied the rock and footprint on it. I took photographs. Then I asked the family elder of the house who owns it. They told the footprint story in detail and I am presenting the summary of his narration as follow:



“Our forefather lived here form prehistoric period and we called ‘Dard’. Our forefather followed some important religions such as Bon, Zoroastrian, Buddhism and Islam”. Except Islam, we adopted religion on our own....when we were Buddhist, Islam was forced on us by an invader called Taj Mugal who came from central Asia. According to our traditional stories, we were Buddhist, there was a holy place in our village. There was a footprint of Buddha that was brought from main Gilgit, that time Gilgit called Gilgitia”. All people round the village used to come to visit the footprint which was placed under a tree in the garden....when our forefathers converted to Islam they slowly and gradually lost the importance and values of the that Ziyarat.people still pay a great respect to Buddisum and did not convert completely.

In another words, they lost Buddhism at the same time did not follow Ismaili Islam completely. True speaking, they adopted their own religion again that was a kind of cosmological religion because Buddisum and Islam were foreign religion imposed on these people time to time. Many years after Taj Mugal, another jihad was imposed by a another Badakhani ruler called Jahangir during Gilgiti ruler Shah Kamal. He completely destroyed Chatorkhand Fort, massacred our people and few could saved their lives running into mountain toward Hayool. In our old tradition, we valued blue stone a lot. In center of Gilgit city (now called Gadi Bagh), there used to be a big blue stone. Whenever kings of Gilgit-Baltistan changed, the new kind used to be crowed on the stone and see this Buddah's footprint has also been carved on the bluestone (he said showing the Buddha's footprint). See this is beautiful and very heard stone " Khan.

When the family shared the story, I noted but I thought to cross check their narrative in historical documents to verify the family member's narrative. On my back to Korea, I searched some history based on some questions such as; was there tradition of making Buddha's footprints? Was there Ziyarat in a very remote village of Gilgit-Baltistan (Chatorkhand)? Was there any fort before? Is there any ruined of the fort in Chatorkhand? What do native people of Chatorkhand know about the fort? Do people of Gilgit-Baltistan used to value blue stone?

I was amazed in my research that I found proof of his each narration in historical record and my observation. Basically, Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan) has been center of Buddhism. Buddhism reached Gilgit-Baltistan in 7th century and flourished. Though there are many beautifully carved Buddha scriptures around Gilgit-Batistan, Buddha Footprint was not found in this area. "The footprint of the Buddha (Buddhapada in Sanskrit, bussokuseki (仏足石) in Japanese) is an imprint of Gautama Buddha's one or both feet. There are two forms: natural, as found in stone or rock, and those made artificially.[1] Many of the "natural" ones, of course, are acknowledged not to be actual footprints of the Buddha, but replicas or representations of them, which can be considered cetiya (Buddhist relics) and also an early aniconic and symbolic representation of the Buddha." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha_footprint

Before Islam, there was a Ziarat (holy place) in Chatorkhand. This Ziyarat was visited my orientalist geologist Frederick Drew in 1800s. He writes "if follow the Ishkoman river we can reach Chatorkhand, an important place of Muslim Ziarat ," (Frederick Drew 1875) (Reference- The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories: a Geographical Account' (London, 1875, 8vo). Reprinted 1980, page 42 <https://archive.org/details/jummooandkashmi00drewgoog> .

A well known history book 'Shah Raees's History of Gilgit-Baltistan' written by a farmer ruler of Gilgit-Baltistan and Hashmatullah Khan in his 'History of Kashmir' have also mentioned about this Taj Mugal who was an Ismaili muslim ruler of Badakhshan, which was part of greater Turkistan. During his rule, a prince of Gilgit-Blatistan ran away from his country and took shutter in Taj Mugal's country. There he converted to Muslim Ismailisum and married Taj Mugal's daughter. After few year, he persuaded Taj Mugal to impose jihad and attack Gilgit-Baltistan to convert the people of the area into Ismaili muslim. As a result, Taj Mugal attacked Gilgit-Baltistan through Brogal pass. He divided his army into two parts, group 1 entered Gilgit-Baltistan through Ishkoman pass and group 2 entered Yasin pass. They ruined everything and forcing all valleys' (Now called district Ghazir) forcing them to be Ismaili Muslim and reached Gilgit, which was capital of Belor country. There he converted all people of Gilgit to Ismaili muslims and then went to Hunza and Nager where those people were also converted. After doing Jihad he went back but left a big number of his Ismaili clergies to make them 'true' Ismaili Muslim.

I also found details about another Badakhani ruler called Jahangir who attacked Ishkoman area and committed atrocities. I am presenting famous historian Ahmad Hasan Dani's narration in his book 'History

of Northern Areas of Pakistan: Upto 2000 A.D' published by Sang-e-Meel Publications in 2001. Page 181-182. He details “

...encouraging rulers to attack Gilgit.
First of all the Malik of Sopur and Bandipur invaded Gilgit. In this situation Gilgit ruler sought help from the Hunza ruler, Sultan Shah ibn Ayasho Khan II, ^{3rd} and the Nagar ruler Shah Kamal. The latter came with full force to save Gilgit. First he suppressed the local rebels. Then he proceeded towards Bunji, where the enemy forces had encamped. The ruler of Bandipur was killed. His soldiers fled via Dashkin in Astor but they were completely routed by Shah Kamal. When he was back in

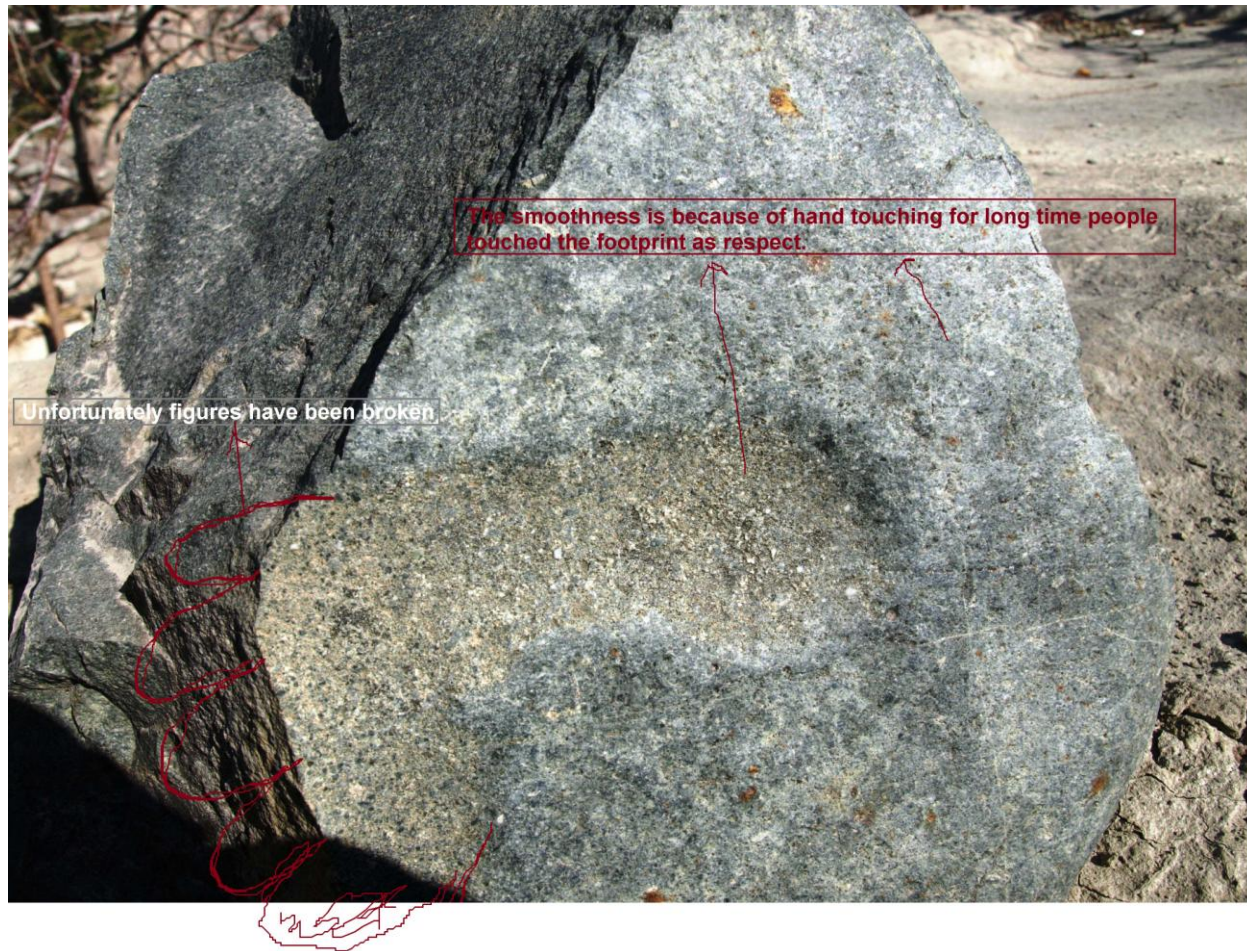
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Gilgit, he heard of another attack by Raja Burush, son of Shah Alam, the Wali of Punial. This Wali was the grandson on daughter's side of Shah Khushwaqt, ruler of Yasin. Taking advantage of the trouble in Gilgit, he had posted there his own grandson. Shah Kamal headed towards Punial. With him were also the forces of Gilgit under the command of Musing and Tubu. The fort of Sher Qila was invested. Raja Burush was captured and later killed. His forces fled from Sher Qila. The two commanders of Gilgit were rewarded and they were appointed ministers. In the meanwhile news of an invasion of Raja Jahangir Badakhshi reached. He tried to invade through Ishkoman. Raja Shah Kamal proceeded towards Ishkoman and there defeated Raja Jahngir. The latter took shelter in the fort of Chaturkand. He was captured and killed. Shah Kamal destroyed the fort of Chaturkand and came back to Punial.

In Chatorkahnd, there used be a fort, which was destroyed by Muslim invaders coming from Central Asia through Brogal Pass. The forts used to be in narrow area going towards pasture area called 'Nala' in local language Hayool. Now the ruined area called in local language 'Kafer ranan nogore' (Kafirs' Fort). I visited the ruins. When people were converted to Islam, they could not give up their holy places such as Chatorkhand Ziyarat where their generation to generation used to pay visit to quench their spiritual thrust. The Ziyarat was very dear to them. However due to indoctrination of Islam, slowly they changed their narrative about the Footprint of Buddah. After many generations they took out Buddah's name from narrative and replaced with an unknown Muslim saint to make it acceptable to Islamic traditions brought from Central Asia. This helped them to keep the Footprint safe and people continued their visits.

During Goher Aman (a Brusho ruler of 18th century) sectarian divided started taking place and difference took shape among Muslim of the region. That time, Ishkoman was under Chitrali rulers those were also hardliner Muslim influenced by Afghanistan. Goher Aman took heard line of Islam and started ignoring places like Chatorkhand Ziyart. Since religion always penetrates from top to masses, Goher Aman's thoughts influenced people and this made people ignoring the Ziyarat. Though they ignored, the respect

of the place was still in the hearts of the people. They did not damage but the Footprint of Buddah left alone in the garden for long time. Very few people visited it.

In 1980s, the hardliner Islam got popularity under the 'kind' support of Army dictator Zia-ul-Haq. His interpreted hardliner Islam reached every corner of Pakistan and Chatorkhand was not an exception. In 1987, a person living in neighbor collected stones for building house and decided to break the Footprint of Buddah. The person belonged to hardliner Islam. The people around were aware of his plan. Taking the opportunity he broke the Footprint of Buddah. The next day a conscious lady from the family came to know the tragedy and she fought with them and picked the survived part of Footprint of Buddah took her home and placed on the roof of her house.



As I mentioned earlier, though the people were converted to Islam but they could not remove the respects of their holy places in the area. They named it Muslim Ziyarat. Historically there was no any muslim ziyarat. If there was any Muslim Ziyart, that would be there till now safe and sound as all people are muslim now. This means this is the family is right that, the Footprint is the same Buddha's Footprint explained by the family. Most interestingly the Footprint has been carved on a dark blue stone and 'blue stone' used to be considered holy stone in the whole region. When Buddhism was state religion, there was a big blue stone in the middle of the main city in Gilgit. When kings of the country changed, he used to be crowed on that blue stone.

Where the Footprint of Buddah having thousand year memories in it heart laying on the roof of a kind lady. The pictures have been taken on the roof of her house. The family elder said with a great worry

“When Taliban dynamited great Buddah statues in Bamiyan Afghanistan, the world cried out but the world knows little that in Gilgit-Baltistan many such tragedies happened and happening. The biggest tragedy is, in this so called civilized world no one says a single words including UNESCO Pakistan, Department of Archeology and Tourism and biased culture preservation organizations in Gilgit-Baltistan”. And he was right!